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ABSTRACT

Following a discussion of contrasts between developed and developing countries, this paper describes problems encountered by the Universal Primary Education program, a project in Nigeria designed to promote literacy and eradicate superstititon and ignorance. Specifically, the following problems are described in the light of rural, traditional perspectives: neglect of agro-based industries, poor incentives for teachers, little consideration for staffing and equipment for rural schools, and little emphasis on vocational education. Opposition by traditional and religious leaders was also found to be problematic. Restructuring the Nigerian educational system, greater incentives for teachers, adequate planning, emphasis on vocational and career education, and increasing educational facilities are some of the solutions suggested. (AS)

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The Universal Primary Education Program in Nigeria: Revisited

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I was a school teacher in Nigeria for many years. I am presently a Doctoral student in the Department of Educational Specialties, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces. I am a member of the Council of Exceptional Children and Phi Delta Kappa. I am the author of Handbook for parents of exceptional children in Nigeria, Las Cruces, New Mexico: New Mexico State University, 1982 (Also available in the Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos, Nigeria).

Abstract

Like any other developing country, Nigeria instituted the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program with the hope of eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and superstition. While many analysts have argued that the UPE program was excessively politicized and without adequate planning, others have looked at it as a program that would enhance equal, self-relient, free and democratic society in Nigeria. After eight years of its implementation, many problems have emerged, and unless they are taken care of the UPE program would be a failure. This paper focuses on the problems of the program from a rural "traditional" perspective and suggest changes that would enhance its credibility in the eyes of Nigerians and other developing countries that have plans to institute such worthy programs.

Introduction

Africa is a continent in a hurry. The effect of unfulfilled dreams of global development strategies has been more sharply felt in Africa than in other continents of the world. Rather than result in an improvement in the economic situation of the continent, successive strategies have made it stagnate and become more succeptible to the economic and social crises suffered by the industrialized countries. Many challenges pose themselves to the continent. To meet the challenges of the late 20th century and prepare for the 21st, Africa will have to take giant steps to cover in twenty years the developmental processes that took the world powers centuries to achieve (Fafunwa 1976). Nigeria took one of those steps in September 1976 when she introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program with the hope of eradicating illiteracy, superstition and ignorance.

After eight years of the institution of the UPE program, it has failed to respond to the following questions:

1. What impact has the program on rural education?
2. Is there a universal free primary education practically in existence?
3. Is there adequate provision of teachers in both rural and urban areas?
4. Has the program really eradicated ignorance and other societal malaise?
5. Has the program changed the socio-political mentally of the citizens of Nigeria?

In May 1961, thirty-seven African nations agreed in the Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) Conference to start the Universal Primary Education programs among member nations. It was a failure because of poor planning. Such a failure was least expected by the military leaders under General Olusegun Obasanjo, the then Head of State. The main objectives were to make Nigeria:

1. A united, strong and self-reliant nation.
2. A great and dynamic economy.
3. A just and egalitarian society.
4. A free and democratic society.
5. A land of bright and full opportunities for all its citizens (Eke, 1972).

This paper presents a) contrasts between the developed and developing countries, b) present problems of the Universal Primary Education program from the rural, traditional perspectives, and c) solutions to the present problems.

Developed and Developing Countries

Peter (1963) in a paper presented at the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Conference in Geneva stated that productivity, the measure of the efficiency with which a nations resources are transformed into commodities and services, is not simply a function of the amount of men power, raw materials, physical capital and equipment available and in use. He argued that productivity also depends heavily on the attitudes,

knowledge and skills of people, which in turn reflect the education, training and complex organizations which modern technology requires.

Staley (1963) made significant contrasts between developed and developing countries:

Developed Countries	Developing Countries
1. High level economy	1. Low level economy
2. High percentage of literacy 80% - 90%	2. Low percentage of literacy 3% - 50%
3. Large percentage of technical labor force, specialists and highly industrialized community; efficiency	3. Peasant and agrerian economy; inefficiency and poor organization
4. High per capita income	4. Very low per capita income
5. Low mortality rate; preventive health program	5. High mortality rate, disease and squalor
6. Independent for many years	6. Recently antonomous or still colonial
7. Well organized and stable political system	7. Transitional political stages
8. Citizenship, rights and obligations recognized	8. Transitional stage
9. Education geared to the needs of the people and and country	9. Inherited system from the colonial era with little relevance to the needs and

	the country or sheer imperiousness to changing times
10. Manufacturers	10. Consumers
11. Masses by and large scientifically-oriented, less superstitious and generally efficient	11. Masses largely superstitious, scientifically illiterate and lacking technical efficiency

(pp. 16-17)

Present Problems of the Universal Primary Education Program

A close analysis of the problems of the developing countries shows that every aspect of the people's lives needs some adjustment or further improvement. Urwick (1983) remarked that political advantage dominated choices of policy, and that basic professional issues and concerns inherent in the planning and social context were often ignored or brushed aside. He wrote:

> The UPE announcement of January 1974 should certainly be seen above all as a grandious gesture intended to win great prestige and popularity for the military leaders (p. 335).

At the inception of the program Nigeria was in her "oil boom". The planners neglected the agro-based industries. Instead of using the wealth from the "boom" to be self-reliant, foreign gadgets have been

continously imported. Agricultural sectors have been neglected, and farming has continued at a subsistent level. The values of the people have been forced to change without reinforcing "subsitute" values. The "oil glut" in the world presently puts Nigeria in a critical position economically. College graduates have found it difficult to get jobs, let alone the high school and elementary school graduates.

The teaching profession has been regarded as a "dumping" ground for the never-do-wells. The teachers are not paid consistently. The "city" teachers receive more consistent salaries than their "rural" peers. This forces most of the teachers to crave for the city while the rural areas suffer. The job is then done half-heartedly and the children suffer greatly. This influx of teachers to the city has created more problems than expected. Nobody wants to teach in the rural areas.

The classrooms are almost "factory" classrooms with little or no equipments. Schools in rural areas receive least considerations in better staffing and provision of equipment. The parents are forced to contribute money so that their children will not be thrown out. Most subsistent farmers fail to provide the money because a) there is no incentive for them to allow their children to learn the western culture, b) they can not afford the money and c) they want the children to drop out so as to help them in farming.

Vocational education has not been given due consideration in the curriculum planning. The people are ashamed to use their bodies, minds

and souls. Bude (1983) recognized the fact that the British colonial masters gave the people little consideration in program planning. The citizens were made messengers and clerks. However, before the coming of the colonial masters, the main stay in the economy was farming and hard work was rewarded. Polygamy was practiced and people were not ashamed to use their "hands" and "heads". Unfortunately today, the dream of an educated Nigerian is to push the pen behind an office desk.

Many traditional and religious leaders have opposed the UPE program. Some religious leaders feel that it is a Christian brainwashing which alienates their children from their own religious beliefs. Some traditionalists do not care about the education of women. In there views, woman should marry and have children. Tribalism, stateism, religious fanaticism, ignorance, superstition, inequality and excessive reliance on foreign-made products are still very prevalant. It stands to reason that the impact of the UPE program is not felt or the impact is politicized. Traditionally, many exceptional children are treated without regard. It is a "survive of the fittest" kind of education for the handicapped. The gifted students are expelled from school because they question a lot. They drop out of school and become societal problems. The indigenes are so superstitious that they dissociate themselves from the multiply handicapped. All the uninformed suppositions about handicapped chilldren are very obvious. Most of these children are locked up in

rooms; and they are not counted as people who have potential like "normal" children.

Solutions

Fafunwa (1976) explained that there is no greater force for social, economic and political advancement than a good educational system, realistically organized and judiciously applied with skill and insight. The UPE program, no doubt, is an important venture that will help Nigerians toward self-realizations. It will be erroneous to assume that the program has failed like the 1961 attempt by member nations. The fact remains that some considerable changes need to be made.

The changes are as follows:

1. The Nigerian educational system needs to be totally re-structured to meet the social, economic and political needs of the people. The educational system should reflect the philosophy of teh country.
2. The UPE program should be practically and theoritically free, if it should be in existence. If it is free in one state, it should be free in another state.
3. Teachers in rural areas should be rewarded by a) consistent payment of salaries and b) extra benefits for agreeing to stay in these areas.

4. Rural schools should be well-equipped with necessary tools such as pipe-borne water project and electrification system.
5. There should be a war against tribalism, religious fanaticism malaise because they conflict with progressive ideals.
6. Adequate planning that considers the needs of the people is necessary. Politicizations of programs should be totally eradicated.
7. Vocational and career education should be given serious considerations. Agriculture should be given its priority.
8. Reading and writing should be in the child's mother tongue. Good children's libraries are imperative.
9. More secondary schools and universities should be built to consume the UPE graduates.
10. There should be less emphasis on certificates. Emphasis should be on what one can do.
11. Voluntary agencies should be allowed to build their own schools in the rural areas. This will help ease the financial and administrative burdens on the federal and state governments.
12. More commercialization needs to be done. More steps should be taken to let the people know that the UPE program is for

the benefit of all. In this vein, adult education programs should be enhanced.

13. The exceptional children need to be properly identified and recognized as people with potentials. Special classrooms should be established rather than the "survival-of-the-fittest" kind of instructional modes.

Summary

In any dynamic society, all areas of human activity are undergoing tremendous changes. New ways of doing things and new problems emerge as old ones are resolved. Fafunwa (1976) concluded that "new skills, new tools and new knowledge open new risks and again create new problems and challenges" (p. 35). A widely acclaimed view of Nigeria's education system submit that the past and present systems lack clear sense of direction. The little learning in the socio-political system intoxicates, and hopefully when it is drunk deep, the system will be sober enough to accept constructive changes. The Nigerian children need to acquire appropriate skills, abilities and competence in order to contribute their own quests to the society. That is why the UPE program needs a revision and the educational system restructuring. There should be a new realism--The time has gone for blaming the colonial masters. The millions of naira invested on education in Nigeria cannot yield the desired dividends unless proper non-politicized progams that consider the societal, economic and political needs of the people are set up.

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